

Real Accountability and Flexibility: Offer Equal Educational Opportunities to All Children. Bring Success to Failing Schools.
Questions and Answers

Accountability

How does Indiana hold schools accountable for educating students?

- Public Law 221, commonly referred to as PL 221, is Indiana's comprehensive accountability system for K-12 education. Passed by the Indiana General Assembly in 1999 – prior to the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 – the law aimed to establish statewide accountability for schools.
- PL 221 places Indiana schools in categories that indicate how well a school is doing. Schools achieving the lowest category placement for five consecutive years are subject to state intervention to make sure they improve.

How can PL 221 be improved?

The current categories are “Exemplary Progress,” “Commendable Progress,” “Academic Progress,” “Academic Watch” and “Academic Probation.” These labels don’t clearly express a school’s status to the general public, and they don’t create a sense of urgency for the school to improve.

What are the new school accountability categories?

- Starting next year, PL 221 will measure progress and place Indiana schools into one of five categories based upon 2010 – 2011 student performance and improvement data. The current categories will be replaced with category names that mirror the way we grade students and are easier for the public to understand: “A,” “B,” “C,” “D,” and “F.”

What factors are used to determine category placement?

- Beginning in 2011, category placement will be based on the following:
 - Performance of all students, based on the following:
 - Percent passing English and math portions of the ISTEP+ exam in Grades 3 through 8
 - For high schools, percent passing English 10 and Algebra I end-of-course assessments, graduation rate, and college and career attainment measures
 - Improvement, based on student growth in ISTEP+ English and math for elementary and middle schools

What are the consequences for schools that fall in the lowest two categories?

- Schools in the lowest two PL 221 categories (“Academic Probation” or “Academic Watch” this year and “D” or “F” starting next year) face a series of interventions designed to improve performance and outcomes for students. These consequences become more

extensive the longer schools remain in the bottom categories, but schools that remain under the control of the school corporation do not lose funding under PL 221.

Are charter schools and non-public schools given category placements?

- Yes, charter schools and accredited non-public schools are placed into categories. Although state law does not make these schools subject to state intervention, they are expected to be held accountable for academic performance.

Making Failing Schools Successful

What is a state turnaround academy?

- A turnaround academy is a school subject to state intervention.

What is an outside management organization?

- An outside management organization is an entity the State Board of Education (SBE) hires to operate any part or all of a state turnaround academy.

How long may a school be in turnaround status?

- State turnaround academies will be given five years to demonstrate measurable results in school culture and achievement. Thus, the SBE will develop a five-year plan that carefully tracks and monitors both leading and lagging indicators for each state turnaround academy.

What happens to a state turnaround academy if the management organization cannot improve student achievement?

- Proposed language requires the SBE to set and monitor annual performance goals with each operating entity. It would allow the SBE to cut short the five-year contract for failure to meet rigorous, specified targets for improvement. The proposal also provides the SBE latitude to extend the contract if the school makes sufficient gains and is moving forward in the best interest of the students.

Is a school still considered part of the corporation if it is in turnaround status?

- No. If a state turnaround academy attains its goals within the contract period, it becomes an independent school, and the SBE will appoint a school board to govern it. This board will have the flexibility to remain independent, contract with a manager or another school, apply for charter status, join other independent schools, or turn over control to the original or another school corporation. Furthermore, if the state or an outside management organization cannot improve student achievement in a five-year span, the school may be returned to the corporation.

How will state turnaround academies be funded?

- State turnaround academies will continue to receive federal and state dollars through the Indiana Department of Education. They will also have access to construction and technology loans from the Common School Fund as well as to transportation and capital projects funds from local tax revenue. State turnaround academies may also contract with corporations for

additional services (e.g. transportation, food service), but corporations will be prohibited from charging state turnaround academies higher rates for these services.

What happens to collective bargaining agreements between school corporations and teachers' unions if the state takes over a school?

- Teachers' collective bargaining contracts will remain in place within all schools in the corporation except a turnaround academy. This means teachers teaching at a school when it becomes a state turnaround academy maintain the rights and benefits outlined in the collective bargaining contract within the school corporation.
- In other words, the outside management organization and turnaround academy leaders will have the freedom and flexibility to make all staffing decisions for the state turnaround academy.

What benchmarks does a school have to meet to leave turnaround status?

- Goals and indicators will be established on a case-by-case basis, based on each school's unique circumstances. The benchmarks will be outlined in the SBE's five-year timeline for each individual school and will likely focus upon school culture and academic outcomes.